

Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Farewell Sermon by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This paper attempts to study and analyse two very significant sermons of human history i.e. the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ (peace be upon him) and the Farewell Sermon of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This purpose of this study is to identify the similarities between both of them. A careful and a deep study of the teachings they contain, explores that a belief in one God, the rule of law, the idea social justice and universal human ethics, as similar ideas which have been taught in both of the sermons to their followers.

Keywords: Sermon, Similarities, Abrahamic faiths, Social justice, Universal human ethics,

Introduction:

The Sermon on the Mount was, according to the Gospel of Matthew (chapters 5-7) a particular sermon given by Jesus of Nazareth delivered around 30 CE on a mountainside to his disciples and a large crowd.¹ Many Christians believe that the Sermon on the Mount is a form of commentary on the Ten Commandments. To many others, the Sermon on the Mount contains the central tenets of Christian discipleship and considered as such by many religious and moral thinkers as Tolstoy, Gandhi and Martin Luther King.² Although the place of this mountain is not mentioned in the New Testament, however, the next localization to the Sermon on the Mount given is Capharnaum.³ It is perhaps for this reason that the sermon is situated by tradition on a broad low hill a few hundred yards from the lakeside, about a mile west of Capharnaum.⁴

The Sermon contains the following topics:

- (1) The Beatitudes (5:3-12)
- (2) The perfection of Justice
 - (i) general statement (5:17-20)
 - (ii) five antithesis: old and new justice (5:21-48)

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(3) Good Works

- (i) general principle (6:1)
- (ii) three applications: almsgiving, prayer and fasting (6:2-18)

Into this part is inserted the Lord's Prayer (6:7-15) after it is added a collection of sayings on single-mindedness (6:19-34)

(4) Three Warnings, each followed by a parabolic development:

- (i) on judgement (7:1-5), followed by various sayings (7:6-14)
- (ii) various sayings (7:6-12)
- (iii) on the two ways of the true and false disciple (7:13-27)

Comparison of the Sermon on the Mount with the Sermon on the Plain

The Sermon on the Mount may be compared with the similar but more succinct Sermon on the Plain as recounted by the Gospel of Luke (6:17-49), which occurs at the same moment in Luke's narrative, and also features Jesus heading up a mountain. Some scholars believe that they are the same sermon, while others say that Jesus frequently preached similar themes in different places. However, a number of scholars believe that at least one sermon never took place, but was a conflation created by the author to frame the primary teachings of Jesus recorded the Document.⁵ The name "Sermon on the Plain" sometimes given to the Lucan version - because of the "level plain" of verse 17 - suggests that the discourse here recorded is distinct from the "Sermon on the Mount" of Matthew. In fact, because of the special symbolical value of "the mountain" in Luke - a place where people do not come - the evangelist has changed the setting. This is entirely a literary device and it is best to keep the same title for both versions. The discourse in Matthew is much longer than that in Luke but, on the other hand, many of the passages found in Matthew: 5-7 occur elsewhere in Luke in chapters 11, 13, 14 and 16. In general, we may say that whereas Matthew, borrowing from other sayings of Jesus, has added to the original Sermon, Luke has omitted some of it. The discourse is introduced by the beatitudes and woes. Only a very small part of the matter dealt with in the antithesis of the Sermon (Compare Matthew, 5: 21-48) is included - the recommendations of the fifth and sixth antithesis of Matthew; but this is sufficient to prove that Luke had known the series of antithesis and had deliberately omitted all the rest. He has combined two sayings by introducing into the middle of the positive part of the sixth antithesis the corresponding part of the fifth:

Matthew, 5:43-48 = Luke, 6:27 + Luke 6: 32-36

Matthew, 5:39-42 = Luke 6:29

Matthew appears to indicate that the disciples were intended to be the main recipients of the address, and so the traditional view, as depicted in art, is that the disciples sat near Jesus, with the crowd beyond but still able to hear. Some scholars are of this opinion that Jesus' sermon is directed to three circles of listeners, his disciples, the crowd and the world in general. Now, let us have an introductory look at the Farewell Sermon by Prophet Muhammad.

The Farewell Sermon:

The Farewell Pilgrimage of the Holy Prophet may rightly be called the culminating point in his Prophetic career. It was the sixty-third year of the Prophet's life, which coincided with the close of the tenth of Hijra that he decided to perform Hajj, which in history, goes by the name of "Hajjat al-Wada". Five days before Dhul Hijja, the prophet put on the pilgrims garb and set out to Mecca with more than 114,000 Muslims along with him.⁶ All his wives accompanied him. As he rode, he recited "Labbayk! Labbayk!" signifying "Here I am at Your service, here I am O Lord!" As he recited the above call, all his companions repeated the same loudly. On the eighth of Dhul Hijja, he left with his companions for Mina and passed the night there and on ninth, after the Morning Prayer, he proceeded to Arafat where he delivered celebrated Farewell Sermon.⁷ The speech that he gave was called "Khutbat al-Wada": the Farewell Speech, the Farewell Khutba, the Farewell Sermon or the Farewell Address. The issues mentioned by the prophet in this Sermon are regarded highly by all Muslims. In his Farewell Sermon, the Prophet addressed several issues:

1. Freedom of humanity
2. Sanctity of life, wealth and property
3. Equality of mankind
4. Justice in front of the law and in front of Allah
5. Women's rights and obligations
6. Exploitation and Monopoly
7. Human Rights

These concepts of the Farewell Sermon delivered by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) may be termed as the summary of the teachings of Islam.

In fact, Christianity and Islam share much in common as compared to other major religions of the world. Although these two Abrahamic faiths have some significant differences, however they have number of similarities as well. Firstly, both trace their origin to the father of all the prophets i.e. Prophet Abraham (peace be upon him). Secondly, both believe in the concept of institution of prophecy, . Thirdly, they believe in the idea of revelation. Fourthly, they support the concept of revealed scriptures. Fifthly, they believe in resurrection of dead and lastly they share the centrality of religious community. This last component is particularly significant. What the church is meant in Christianity, the "ummah" is meant in Islam.

The careful study of both the sermons shows following elements as largely similar in both of the world religions.

I: Teachings about belief in one God:

Christianity and Islam are originally monotheistic religions. They both, apart from some differences in details in belief in one God, teaches their adherents to believe in one God and to rely upon Him only in all the matters of worldly life as mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount by Jesus Christ and in Farewell Sermon by Prophet Muhammad.

The Sermon on the Mount teaches us how to avoid the pulls of this world through trusting in God and seeking His Kingdom and righteousness before all other priorities in life. Jesus says: “But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one”.⁸ And in another place he says: “No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth”.⁹

Likewise, Prophet Muhammad said in his Farewell Sermon: “Here I am at thy service, here I am O Lord!’ I am here and declare that there is no partner with You; I am here at Your service. All praise and thanks and blessings belong to You I am here I am here You hast no partner O God! I am here at Thy service”.¹⁰

II: Teachings about the Rule of Law:

The rule of law, in its most basic form, is the principle that no one is above the law. Thomas Paine stated in his pamphlet: “For as in absolute governments the king is law, so in free countries the law ought to be king; and there ought to be no other”.¹¹

In England, the issuing of the Magna Carta was a prime example of the “rule of law”. This Charter forced King John to submit to the law and succeeded in putting limits on feudal fees and duties.

Hundreds of years earlier than that Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the Rule of Law. Jesus Said in this regard:

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven”.¹²

The Quran and the conduct of the Prophet (PBUH) were also to serve as the basics of law and a healthy criterion in every aspect of human life. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in the Farewell Sermon: “I leave behind me two things, the Quran and my Sunna and if you follow these you will never go astray”. He abolished private justice. The Prophet declared: Every right arising out of homicide in pre-Islamic days is henceforth waived and the first such right that I waive is that arising from the murder of Rabia ibn al- Harith ibn al Muttalib”.¹³

III: Teachings about the Justice:

Justice concerns the proper ordering of things and persons within a society. As a concept, it has been subject to philosophical, legal, and theological reflection and debate throughout history. According to most theories of justice, it is overwhelmingly important. They both Jesus Christ (PBUH) and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) described the importance of human rights before their audience at that time and to all of humanity up to date and until the day of resurrection.

1. Right of life:

Right to life is a phrase that describes the belief that a human being has an essential right to live, particularly that a human being has the right not to be killed by another human being. The concept of a right to life is central to debates on the issues of capital punishment, euthanasia, self defense, abortion and war. The right to life is enshrined in article 3 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, making it a legally enforceable right in every United Nations member state:

“Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”.¹⁴

Both the Prophets (PBUT) explained the sanctity of human life regardless of creed, color and language differences as Jesus said:

“You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, You shall not murder; and whoever murders shall be liable to judgement. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say ‘You fool’, you will be liable to the hell of fire”.¹⁵

Here, he (PBUH) implies that the commandment limited the offence to murder (and by extension to violent acts that could cause injury and death) only because God wanted the commandment to be enforceable. In other words, this commandment represents the translation of a moral principle into a form useful for maintaining peace in society. It is clear from examination of this passage that the underlying principle is the prohibition against hating our brother.¹⁶ There is a causal connection between hatred and murder. Hatred is the motive and murder is the outcome. Murder is the natural and even the inevitable consequence of hatred if all restraints are removed. Just because restraints exist and force us to hold our hand when we hate someone does not make us guiltless. Jesus singled out three particular expressions of hatred, describing all three as offenses against a “brother” a term implying a fellow servant of God. He did not condemn using the same expressions with reference to someone who is wicked. Jesus taught that we should love our enemies as well as our friends. Why then do his comments on anger have a limited compass, restricted to offenses against a brother? It is right to be angry with a brother who, for instance, has corrupted a child. There is such a thing as righteous anger, as distinct from reckless rage, although even this sort of anger must be tempered by forgiveness. The second offense is calling a brother “Raca”, Aramaic for a worthless person. Regarding a person in this way is also a motive for murder.

The third offense is saying to a brother, “You fool”. For us, a fool is merely someone who is silly or stupid. But, the term in Jesus’ day was a deeply cutting insult with moral overtones. It pointed out to someone who was not wise before God - to an evil person, a reprobate. To see a fellow human being as essentially evil can serve as a motive for killing him. The killing done by rioters caught up in genocide or civil insurrection fall under this heading.

The three offenses are scaled from least to most serious. To be angry is bad, but to consider a brother as Raca is worse. It is insult to his creator.¹⁷ And to characterize a true brother as wicked is worst of all. If we fail to love our brother whom we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen.¹⁸

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared in this regard: “ O People! Just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust.... Remember one day you will meet Allah and answer for your deeds”.¹⁹

No one has superiority over any other except by the individual excellence in the manner of piety and fear of God. Excellence of moral character is the only criterion of individual superiority in the eyes of God. However, every person enjoyed equality in the eyes of the Law and in the eyes of God, because he is a member of the human race. The Prophet (PBUH) put it in these words: “All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white- except by piety and good action”.

2. Right of Property (Economic Justice):

Property means right of action for things that can be exchanged. Important types of property include real property (land), personal property (other physical possessions), and intellectual property (rights over artistic creations, inventions, etc). A right of ownership is associated with property that establishes the good as being one’s own thing and relation to other individuals or groups, assuring the owner the right to dispense with the property in a manner he or she sees fit, whether to use or not use, exclude others from using, or to transfer ownership.

Jesus Christ (PBUH) Declared in this regard:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for you treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.²⁰

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) declared constant redistribution of the wealth, and circulation of the private wealth and its accumulation must be avoided by means of (1) prohibition of interest (2) obligatory inheritance and distribution of deceased person’s property among near relatives of both sexes and (3) restrictions on wills (no more than 1/3 by way of legacy).²¹

3. Better treatment of women (Domestic Justice):

God has given the women same rights and obligations as men and abolished all sorts of discrimination with women based on her gender. Religion recognizes all

the rights inherently possessed by women and girls of all ages, which may be institutionalized, ignored or suppressed by law, custom and behavior in a particular society. These rights are grouped together and differentiated from broader notions of human rights, because they often differ from the freedoms inherently possessed by or recognized for men and boys and because activism surrounding this issue claims an inherent historical and traditional bias against the exercise of rights by women.

Issues commonly associated with notions of rights of women include, though not limited to, the right: to bodily integrity and autonomy; to vote (universal suffrage); to hold public office; to work; to fair wages or equal pay; to own property; to education; to serve in the military; to enter into legal contracts; and to have marital, parental and religious rights. Jesus said in this regard:

“You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell”.²²

Furthermore, he said, “whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce”. But, I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery”.²³

The farewell address puts it this way: “O People! It is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah’s trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right, then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste. O People, listen to me in earnest.....The child belongs to the marriage-bed, and the violator of wedlock shall be stoned and reckoning of their deeds rests with Allah.

O People! Verily, you have got certain rights over your women and your women have certain rights over you. It is your right upon them to honour their conjugal rights and not to commit acts of impropriety, which if they do, you are authorised by Allah to separate them from your beds and chastise them, but not severely and if they refrain then clothe and feed them properly. Behold! It is not permissible for a woman to give anything from the wealth of her husband to anyone but with his consent. Treat the women kindly, since they are your helpers and not in a position to manage their affairs themselves. Fear Allah concerning women, for verily you have taken them on the security of Allah and have made their persons lawful unto you by words of Allah”.²⁴

VI. Morality:

In the modern world, morality is termed as ethic of reciprocity, which may be called the Golden Rule. The ethic of reciprocity or the Golden Rule is a fundamental moral value, which simply means “treat others as you would like to be treated”. It is arguably the most essential basis for the modern concept of human rights. Ethical teaching interprets this rule as mutual respect for one’s neighbour rather than as a deontological or consequentialist rule. A key element of this rule is that a person attempting to live by this rule treats all people, not just members of his or her in group with consideration. This rule, with roots in a wide range of world cultures could appeal in resolving conflicts. Principal philosophers and religious figures have stated it in different ways.

Several passages in the New Testament quote Jesus of Nazareth espousing this morality including the following:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets”.²⁵

In the last Sermon, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) admonished believers:

“Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you”.²⁶

Conclusion:

These Sermons were indeed addressed to all humankind at all times and for all generations. They encompass many aspects of life (general and specific). They laid down the foundation of morality, chastity, modesty, justice, equality, unity and accountability. They abolished economic exploitation, human enslavement, paganism, transgression and all systems that contradict with the system of God.

They should be taught in schools and its universal values and principles are to be followed by all segments of the society. These values and principles made sense when they were first delivered. They are making sense now. All people are in need to them everywhere. They will make sense forever until the day of judgement, because the original source of these values and principles came from God the Creator of the universe.

The world has not been able to lay down better principles of ethics and morality than those enunciated in these two Sermons. Every word of them breathes a spirit of magnanimity and aims at establishing righteousness and fair dealing among men on a workable basis. It establishes unity among whole of the humanity irrespective of the divergence of their geographical, racial, colour backgrounds, and provides an outline of a social order, perfectly free from oppression and injustice.

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